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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Islam and Democracy -
Controversial Drawings and Free Press Iran North Korea
PARIS - Friday, February 03, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Islam and Democracy - Controversial Drawings and Free Press
Iran
North Korea

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

The uproar over images of the Prophet Mohamed is a lead story in Le Figaro, Le Monde, France Soir and Liberation, which compares the crisis to the Fatwa against Salman Rushdie for his 'Satanic Verses.' Several national dailies are publishing some or all of the controversial drawings. Commentators argue that France's freedom of the press cannot be curtailed. On LCI television last evening Interior Minister Sarkozy said he preferred "caricatures to censorship." FM Douste-Blazy made a formal declaration re-iterating the importance of freedom of the press, but insisted on the need for "tolerance and respect for all." Fatah has threatened all citizens of countries having published the drawings of reprisals. France Soir, which carried all the drawings in yesterday's edition, has been banned in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria. (See Part C)

Le Figaro reports on the different approaches to North Korea adopted by Secretary Rice, "who is calling for renewed relations," and President Bush who has been using the word "criminal" with the regime (See Part C) and on the "last ditch efforts of the IAEA in trying to reach a consensus with Iran" before putting the affair in the hands of the UNSC. (See Part C)

La Croix devotes its lead to Iraq and asks: "Who is still going to Iraq?" "Foreigners are avoiding Iraq, it is too dangerous. Investors are opening rear bases in Amman and Beirut. The security sector is the only sector employing foreigners." La Croix interviews French businessmen who acknowledge they have "reduced their level of business in Iraq."

Results of a poll in Le Parisien, show that Segolene Royal of the Socialist Party could lead and beat Interior Minister Sarkozy in the run-off, with 51 percent of the votes against 49 percent. But another poll in Le Figaro shows Sarkozy the winner in both rounds, ahead of PM Villepin.

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Islam and Democracy - Controversial Drawings and Free Press

"Freedom of Drawing"

Left-of-center Le Monde in its editorial (02/03):

"Commandments and religious bans are not above the law in a republican and secular state. It is essential to make a distinction between a religion and those that practice it. The latter must be protected from all forms of discrimination. A Muslim can be shocked by a drawing, especially a malicious one, of Mohamed. But a democracy cannot impose an opinion police or risk treading on the feet of Human Rights."

"A Matter of Conscience"

Yves Thieudant in right-of-center Le Figaro (02/03): "Although there is freedom of opinion in the West, this cannot excuse everything. In practice, conscience must also dictate what is wrong. The drawings are adding to the confusion in the clash between civilizations. Without freedom, the press would be poor, but one can also make poor use of the freedom of the press. This is why Le Figaro will not publish the drawing."

"Antagonisms"

Antoine de Gaudemar in left-of-center Liberation (02/03):

"Seventeen years later, these controversial drawings have taken on the look of 'satanic drawings,' recalling the Rushdie controversy. The debate is shedding light on several conflicts. First, between two opposite systems of values: one based on a secular society, the other, a system where religion is the center of a people's identity. The antagonism between these two systems is complicated by yet another conflict: the

notion of freedom of the press. Many Muslims can indeed feel insulted by the assimilation between Islam and terrorism. But the strength of democracy and the press lies in allowing free expression. This does not mean it supports any form of racism."

Iran

"A Last Attempt at a Consensus"

Maurin Picard in right-of-center Le Figaro (02/03): "The atmosphere in Vienna was heavy as the IAEA was conferring to decide whether to bring the Iran nuclear issue before the UNSC. This board of directors has yet to go to the next phase of voting. According to El-Baradei, 'we are not in a situation of crisis.' The ball is in the hands of the Iranians. For at least a month: on March 6 El-Baradei will need to give his conclusions on 'as yet unresolved issues.' Only then will the UNSC be able to take over and decide on potential sanctions against Iran."

North Korea

"One Adjective, and Relations Remain Frozen"

Jean-Jacques Mevel in right-of-center Le Figaro (02/03): "Can the Bush administration sit at the same table with a nation it has qualified as 'criminal?' For North Korea, it is not possible. Its neighbors say that taking back that single adjective would be enough. In this affair, the U.S. is playing two different games. The Secretary of State has just made a declaration to the effect that she intends to re-launch the dialogue with North Korea 'immediately,' For the past four months, the use of the adjective 'criminal' associated to North Korea by the White House has stalled the talks. The Bush administration could have used the Beijing compromise made by North Korea. Instead, and for reasons that remain unclear, Washington persists in its stance at the risk of prolonging the standstill and re-enforcing a battle of words, giving the North Koreans an alibi for their empty chair policy. It also gives them an un-hoped for additional delay to keep arming themselves. The word 'criminal' has been used at least three times by American high officials, Ambassador Vershbow, Assistant Secretary Glaser and David Asher." STAPLETON